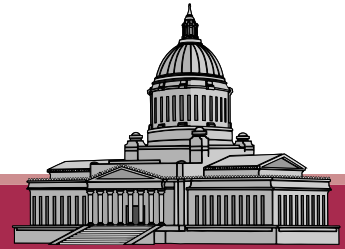
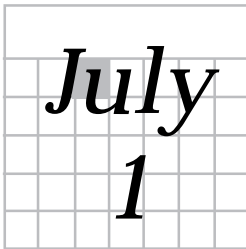




Representative Debbie Regala



27th District Legislative Report



These new laws go into effect:

- 1997-98 Biennial Budget
- Juvenile Justice
- Trauma Care funding
- Welfare Reform



These measures will appear on the Nov. ballot:

- Property Tax Relief
- Storm sewer improvements

Other Issues:

- Medicare taxes
- Environmental laws
- Capital Construction

Dear Friend,

I'm proud to be your Representative in Olympia and on your behalf add my voice to the debate on issues important to the 27th District and the State of Washington. The recently completed 1997 legislative session brought mixed results for the people of the 27th District. There were some victories and some disappointments. After years of contentious debate, the Legislature finally passed a Juvenile Justice bill. With the help of many of my colleagues and Gov. Locke, funding for educational programs important to our schools was partially restored during the final days. Last-minute negotiations also helped to rescue the Trauma Care Act. Although not a final solution to the problem, this law is a start in identifying a revenue source for this vital service. In addition, welfare reform is a reality in our state. But there is much to be done before the "WorkFirst" program succeeds at moving families from welfare to independence.

This report details some of the new laws that took effect July 1. It also explains two measures that voters will decide in November. When all the victories and disappointments are weighed in the balance, I think you will see that this was a mixed session for families.

Many of you took the time to contact me during the session on a wide variety of subjects. I really appreciate your participation in the legislative process. Please continue to keep in touch whenever you have information or advice to share with me.

Sincerely,

Debbie Regala
Debbie Regala

Here's how to reach me:

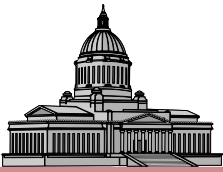
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Representative Debbie Regala

State Operating Budget

Lawmakers approved two operating budget bills which appropriated \$19.085 billion for the next two years. In addition, \$367 million worth of tax cuts were also approved. This year, state spending for public education continued to lose ground to inflation, as it has nearly every year since the budget emergency of 1993. However, there was some good news for our local public schools and higher education institutions. On the last two days of the 105-day session, the majority party was persuaded to restore levy capacity and funding for complex needs students, magnet schools and student learning improvement grants. These were key priorities for our local school districts. Enrollment at our local colleges and universities was also increased. The UW-Tacoma campus will have 245 more openings; Tacoma Community College will have 63 more slots; Pierce College will add 84 openings; and Bates and Clover Park Technical Colleges received funding for 57 and 58 slots respectively.

One long-term concern that I have is the recent practice by budget-writers of shifting programs previously funded from dedicated accounts into the general fund. This will have the effect of shrinking the budget pie when the Initiative 601 spending lid is taken into account, meaning that critical areas such as education will feel the pinch.

Juvenile Justice Reform

From 1986 through 1994, under Democratic majorities, several major public safety measures were enacted. Overall crime in Washington has declined in recent years, but our criminal court system has struggled to keep pace with the challenge of youth crime. During the past three years, the Legislature has been unable to agree on Juvenile Justice Reform. I'm pleased to report that in 1997 — 20 years after lawmakers last made significant changes to youth offender laws — the Juvenile Justice Act of 1997 passed both the House and the Senate unanimously. The new law includes prosecuting and punishing the most violent 16- and 17-year-old offenders through the adult system; adding more detention time for crimes committed with

a firearm; extending sentences for some crimes to allow time for appropriate rehabilitation services; providing drug-abuse treatment options; and involving parents in the court process.

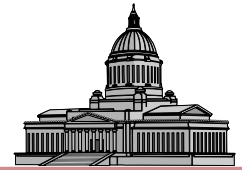
Trauma Care Funding

Last-minute negotiations resulted in the passage of the Trauma Care Act, which creates a funding source for the state's trauma care system. Trauma centers are the only places where emergency personnel may legally take the severely injured. For Pierce County residents, Harborview Medical Center in Seattle is the closest designated trauma care center for critical victims, since St. Joseph's Hospital and MultiCare Health Center no longer accept critical patients. While not a complete solution, SB 5127 was a compromise and will raise \$17 million to maintain current trauma centers by placing surcharges on automobile title transactions and traffic tickets. I will continue to work closely with other Pierce County lawmakers to resolve this situation.

Welfare Reform

Welfare has served as a financial support system for families of all shapes and sizes since the Great Depression. Originally designed to assist widows with children, public-assistance programs evolved over the years into a comprehensive support network for needy families. I joined with others to support Gov. Locke's creative yet tough reform plan called "WorkFirst." That proposal, which is now law, requires work and also provides the training, child care and health care needed to keep families whole. The governor called for new partnerships among businesses, community organizations, educators and families to help break the cycle of welfare dependency. Even though I'm pleased with the results, I believe there is still room for improvement, and I will continue to work on meaningful ways to put Washingtonians to work — and to keep them independent.

27th District Legislative Report



Property Tax Relief

This year, with a projected \$1 *billion* surplus that could not be spent under Initiative 601, the state budget had ample resources to provide meaningful property tax relief to all homeowners. In January, Rep. Fisher and I endorsed the Homeowner's Property Tax Credit to give virtually all homeowners a \$205 break on their yearly property tax payments. That plan would free homeowners from paying state property taxes on the first \$62,000 of their property valuation. The majority leadership rejected this approach because it would not provide additional tax cuts to businesses, who have reaped the lion's share of tax relief over the last three years. The GOP proposal, which would save the average homeowner only about \$17 a year, will appear on the November ballot.

Medicare Premium Tax

Without action by the 1997 Legislature, a Medicare premium tax would be levied against Health Maintenance Organizations (HMO) effective July 1. Revenue from this tax would be used to fund subsidized health care for the working poor. When this tax was approved in 1993, it was assumed the federal government would enact a universal health plan. However, the federal plan did not pass and there was a major concern that this tax would be unfairly passed on to senior citizens. It was estimated that Medicare beneficiaries — the elderly and the disabled — would incur a new payment of about \$8 a month, or \$100 a year. Approved by lawmakers, HB 1219 exempts HMO's from this tax, which is a relief for seniors and the disabled.

Environmental Laws

Again this year there was a wide range of anti-environmental proposals that, I believe, ignore the unmistakable will of the public. Dozens of measures seeking to weaken the Growth Management Act, reallocate scarce water resources, limit government oversight of pollution, and open scenic areas to development were introduced. Fortunately, nearly all

of these measures failed to pass because they represented narrow special interests.

In contrast, three environmental measures developed through a collaborative, consensus process did become law. I believe it is possible for environmentalists and industry representatives to sit down, discuss their differences, and then work together to pound out creative solutions to many long-standing conflicts. I believe this is how all legislation should be done.

I was proud to add my name as a prime sponsor to:

HB 1985 — Provides that timber landowners who develop long-term plans for conserving habitat while harvesting timber will have regulatory certainty by exempting them from new regulations;

HB 1969 — Allows federal money to be disbursed to public water systems to address drinking water contamination problems, water conservation, and to reduce costs for small water systems; and

SB 7900 — Implements four of the priority issue recommendations of the Model Toxics Control Act Policy Advisory Committee.

Capital Construction

In addition to the operating budget, which supports day-to-day operations of government, lawmakers also adopt a capital budget — informally known as a bricks-and-mortar budget — every two years. The 1997-98 Capital Budget, which mostly covers construction and repair of schools, prisons, state buildings, and other investments, contains funding for several local projects:

- Construction of UW-Tacoma — \$19.7 million
- International Museum of Modern Glass — \$1 million
- Renovation of the Dickman Mill site along Commencement Bay — \$1 million
- Seismic renovations to historic Fire Station #13 in the North End — \$100,000
- Renovation of an historic building at Fort Nisqually in Point Defiance Park — \$29,000

Representative Debbie Regala

27th District

Storm Sewer
Improvements

In addition to the ballot issue on property tax relief, voters will also decide whether to give local governments the authority to provide homeowners and businesses with low-interest loans and other affordable financing to improve their stormwater and sewage infrastructure. Such repairs can be quite costly, yet more efficient systems can improve the overall capacity for the utility. I was pleased to sponsor this legislation with strong support from the City of Tacoma, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Department of Ecology.



Cassandra Roberts, a junior at Wilson High School, served as a legislative page for Rep. Regala earlier this year during the 1997 Legislative Session. If you know of a high school student who may be interested in serving as a page, please call (360) 786-7974 for information.

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